

Collage as Identity in *The Black Family* by Vincent Smith

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*Dedicated to Emily, for inspiring me to explore beyond my own Diaspora, expanding the horizons of my world.*

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Vincent Smith (1929-2003) made a name for himself on the canvas of American culture during the 1960s and 1970s as an artist who emphasized the salience of Black artists and their work within the American consciousness. His socially and racially engaged figurative paintings take on vibrant colors and surface texture, as he often combines traditional oil painting with collage and sand. Vincent Smith's artwork, which also includes monoprints, etchings, and book illustration, has been exhibited around the U.S. and Africa in privately owned galleries, major museums, including the Studio Museum in Harlem, colleges and universities, and various cultural centers. His commissions include murals in Harlem and Brooklyn, book illustrations, and paintings.<sup>1</sup>

Although it appears that Smith's artwork has had a broad exposure during his lifetime, very little has been written about the artist. No one has yet written a monographic study of his oeuvre. What has been written falls into three basic categories. Brief biographic information and basic analyses are included in the survey textbooks of Samella Lewis's *African American Art and Artists* (University of California Press, 1990) and Sharon F. Patton's *African-American Art* (Oxford University Press, 1998). These basic discussions of Vincent Smith have focused on his artwork of social protest, his jazz influenced monoprints, and his African series. However, none of these discussions place Smith in a larger art historical context beyond the Black art community. I have found in minor archives and appearances in various art magazines a second category, which comprises a small number of interviews with the artist. These interviews and articles primarily discuss Smith's initiation into the world of painting. They also highlight his artistic influences and cohorts in addition to his relationship with African and Black art. Last, most recently, in 2001 Nancy E. Green, Senior Curator of prints, drawings, and photographs at the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University, organized a retrospective of the artist's work, three years prior to his death. This

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<sup>1</sup> Sharon F. Patton, *African-American Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 195. The book Smith illustrated, titled *Folklore Stories from Africa* is described in Driskell, David C., "An Old Look, A New Vision," *Exhibition of Oils and Drawings, African Series #2*, Larcada Gallery, 4 January-28 January, 1977.

retrospective contains the most comprehensive biography of his life and art thus far.

Therefore, my exploration of this lesser known artist is drawn from these fragmentary sources in order to reclaim Vincent Smith's seminal position not only as an artist within the Black community, but also within a broader American cultural context.

What we can glean from these sources is that Smith was born in 1929 to parents who had migrated from Barbados, West Indies, in the early 1920s; one of five children—two boys and three girls—he was raised in Brooklyn; and he dropped out of school at age sixteen.<sup>2</sup> Early in his life he gained a socially conscious mindset. Finding work on the Lackawanna Railroad shortly after World War II, Smith explained to art historian David C. Driskell that, “My first social awareness came about in 1947 while I was working on the Lackawanna Railroad—repairing the tracks, listening to the chants, visiting bars and roadhouses and looking into the faces of the people who lived near the tracks in rural communities.”<sup>3</sup> Following his work on the railroad, Smith served in the army until 1949. While we do not know details of this service, we know he spent time in the South, where he told *National Scene Magazine* in an interview in November 1980, “This traveling was a real revelation for me, to experience the conditions under which our people had to live.”<sup>4</sup> Upon completion of his army experience in 1949, he became active in the early civil rights movement through his acquaintance with civil rights forerunner Paul Robeson (1898-1976) in 1964. To satisfy his noetic interest in African history, he studied under the tutelage of Dr. W. Alphaeus Hunton

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<sup>2</sup> Sharon Patton, “Vincent Smith: Painter,” *Artist and Influence* 9 (1990): 144. For information on Smith's immigrant parents, see The Art Galleries of Ramapo College, “Chronology,” in *Vincent Smith: An Overview, Combinations, Permutation, and Transformation*, ed. Louise Pocock (Mahwah, NJ: The Art Galleries of Ramapo College, 1988). 23.

<sup>3</sup> Patton, “Vincent Smith: Painter,” 143. After dropping out of high school, Vincent Smith engaged in such ventures that expanded his horizons in an informal educational way. His experiences drew him closer to the condition of race inequality that brought him a greater sense of social awareness in the U.S. See Sharon Fitzgerald, “Vincent Smith: Sage, Bohemian, Prince,” in *American Visions*, 14, 3, June/July 1999: 25, quoting the artist.

<sup>4</sup> The artist, quoted in “A Painter Looks Back,” *National Scene Magazine*, vol. 11, no. 10, November 1980, 12.

(1903-1970) in 1952.<sup>5</sup> Smith returned to his home state of New York and found a job at a post office at the age of twenty-one. While at work, he met a local painter, Tom Boutis (dates unknown), who encouraged him to visit the Paul Cézanne exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Smith, a high school dropout with no formal background in the visual arts, was inspired by this museum visit and returned to museums and to libraries thereafter in order to study what little there was about the African-American artistic legacy.<sup>6</sup> About the experience of seeing the 1952 Cézanne exhibit, Smith said, “I came away so moved with a feeling that I had been in touch with something sacred. For a year afterward I haunted the libraries reading everything I could get my hands on about art, literature, philosophy, religion, existentialism.”<sup>7</sup> In fact, the Cézanne exhibit served as the catalyst that inspired him to become a painter. In an interview with Sharon Patton from 1990, he shared, “By the end of that year I knew that I was not going to stay in the post office any longer. I made a couple of trips up to Montreal and stayed much longer than I was supposed to stay and when I came back the postmaster called me and said, ‘You’ve got a very bad attendance record here. If I fire you you’ll never be able to get a government job again so I would suggest that you resign.’ So I did and that’s when I decided to become a professional artist.”<sup>8</sup>

The elision of artwork by Black painters on the walls of art museums vexed him as yet another instance of racial inequality and acted to further his interest in actualizing a career as a painter. “I didn’t see anything reflecting the Black experience or Black contribution to American culture,” he mentions.<sup>9</sup> He explains in his interview with *National Scene Magazine* from 1980, that becoming a professional Black artist was largely unprecedented during this

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Robeson was an accomplished scholar, actor, musician, and athlete. He is known for his concern for social equality and involvement in civil rights efforts. Dr. W. Alphaeus Hunton was a leader in the Council on African Affairs, a group that advocated for Pan-African and anticolonialist policy. “A Painter Looks Back,” *National Scene Magazine*, vol. 11, no. 10, November 1980, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Patton, “Vincent Smith: Painter,” 144.

<sup>7</sup> The artist, quoted in “A Painter Looks Back,” 12.

<sup>8</sup> The artist, quoted in Patton, “Vincent Smith: Painter,” 144.

<sup>9</sup> The artist, quoted in Sharon F. Patton, “Vincent Smith: Images and Evocations,” *Black American Literature Forum*. Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Indiana, (Spring 1985, Volume 19, No. 1): 26-27.

time. While there was a small, close-knit group of Black artists, their work remained within the African-American community. "People were used to black musicians and performers, but the visual arts were sacred territory," he remarked. "Most people I came in contact with never knew a black painter nor had they hardly ever heard of one.... There were no black art historians, blacks with PHD's [*sic*] were unheard of. Few blacks taught art in colleges in the north; there were no publications about black visual arts." He explains this notion of the visual arts being 'sacred territory' through the following insight of racist elitism in art: "The art world has to do with white values and archaeology, white civilization, and European traditions. Images that affect, or reflect white society."<sup>10</sup>

After resigning from his job as a postal worker, he enrolled at the Art Students League in 1953 and studied under one of the most nationally respected figure artists, Reginald Marsh (1898-1954). Then, at the Brooklyn Museum Art School, Smith initially sat in on classes and was formally accepted to study there from 1954-1956. He also studied in Maine at the Skowhegan School of Painting in 1955 with famous artists such as Rubin Tam, Sidney Simon, Ben Shahn, William Cummings, and Michael Scaporia.<sup>11</sup> About his experience at Skowhegan, Smith notes that: "Students from all over the country were there as well as from abroad, and all we did was paint all day.... So, when I got back to the city I was still inspired, the paintings just flowed out of me. Madonnas with children, street scenes, landscapes, market places, portraits, still lifes, nudes, you name it, I painted it, baby."<sup>12</sup> In 1967 Smith

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<sup>10</sup> Smith comments that the small group of Black artists who worked alongside one another in New York consisted of the following artists: Joseph Ducayet, Karl Parbosingh, Harvey Cropper, Arthur Hardy, Walter Williams, Cliff Jackson, Sam Middleton, Tommy Ellis, Dave Brown, Arthur Monroe, Earl Miller, Al Hicks, Edgar Fitt, Selvin Goldbourne, Virginia Cox, Jack Morton, Ted Joans, Jimmy Gittens, the artist himself, and white painter Samuel Goldwyn. This list of artists as well as the quotes in the main body of this essay appear in "A Painter Looks Back," 12.

<sup>11</sup> Vincent Smith, New York, NY, Curriculum Vitae, Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, OH, indicates the dates he studied and worked at the institutions mentioned. The list of his fellow coeval artists from Skowhegan comes from "A Painter Looks Back," *National Scene Magazine*, vol. 11, no. 10, November 1980, 12.

<sup>12</sup> "A Painter Looks Back," 12.

worked as an instructor at the Whitney Museum Art Resources Center.<sup>13</sup> As a Black artist, Vincent Smith was a pioneer, laying the ground for the flood of Black artists, Black criticism, and Black visual arts publications that would populate the African-American world several decades later.

Vincent Smith typically paints in a style that conveys a forceful approach to his subject matter. His style is highly emotive with gestural brushwork as seen in *Five Spot after Dark (for Miles)*, 1989, (**fig. 1**). Smith's work, especially his more developed style from the 70s and later, is characterized by a rough and bold surface. His use of sand, as in *Girl with Flower*, 1972, (**fig. 2**), produces a seemingly aggressive and angered surface treatment; its extremely thick and painterly surface has been described as "forceful."<sup>14</sup> Smith often combined painting, collage, dress fabrics, oil, and sand.<sup>15</sup> The way in which Smith applied layer upon layer of paint can be considered combative, as seen in *Before the Mayflower*, 1972, (**fig. 3**). Indeed, each brushstroke possesses an untamed energy and thickness that suggests vigorous and forceful gesture.

Music had been a part of Smith's life from a young age when he learned to play the piano and alto saxophone. Thus, the influence that music had on Smith's subject matter and style comes as no surprise.<sup>16</sup> In fact, Smith notes, "I knew more about music than I knew about painting when I got into painting." Listening to jazz while painting, as he did, likely produced such an uncalculated, gestural effect on his work. "When I paint, I'm always listening to jazz...jazz stimulated me to get some power into what I was painting..."<sup>17</sup> Smith recalled that jazz, among other types of music, continually played an integral role in his

<sup>13</sup> Vincent Smith, New York, NY, Curriculum Vitae, Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, OH, indicates the date he worked at the Whitney Museum Art Resources Center.

<sup>14</sup> Peter A. Mark, "African Influences in Contemporary Black American Painting," *Art Voices*, January/February, 1981, 15.

<sup>15</sup> For a reference to fabric, see John Canaday, "Art: Vincent Smith's Expressive Style," *New York Times*, 21 April 1973, pg. 23. For a reference to painting technique, see David C. Driskell, "An Old Look, A New Vision," Exhibition Review in *Exhibition of Oils and Drawings by Vincent Smith*, (Larcada Gallery, January 4-28, 1977).

<sup>16</sup> Nancy Green, "Introduction," *Dreams, Myths, and Realities: A Vincent Smith Retrospective*, (Ithaca: Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, January 27-March 18, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Patton, "Vincent Smith: Painter," 146.

development as a painter. Listening to blues, bebop, Dixieland, funk, and doo-wop significantly contributed to his involvement in the arts world. To acquaint himself better with the arts scene in New York, he devoted many nights visiting jazz clubs throughout Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Harlem. He developed close relationships with fellow bohemian artists and musicians, who served as a network of support for the budding artist.<sup>18</sup>

In this essay, I will discuss one particular painting, *The Black Family* (**fig. 4**), painted in 1972 or 1973,<sup>19</sup> to understand the strategies the artist used to insert his personal and cultural identity within certain aspects of the context of the art world during the 1970s. *The Black Family* is typical in Smith's repertoire in that its subject matter draws upon the artist's social, personal, and racial engagement. Yet, I argue that it stands apart from Smith's other works in that the artist attempts to insert a Black experience into the visual traditions established by Renaissance art, widely accepted as "high art," in the art world of his day. It is my opinion that the artist does so by painting an African-American family's portrait that resembles a traditional Holy Family theme. A consideration of the artist's biography in correspondence with the visual clues from the painting has led me to the following analysis of *The Black Family* which, I suggest, provides insight into the way the artist negotiated and engaged the painting within the cultural dynamics of the 1970s.

## VISUAL DESCRIPTION OF *THE BLACK FAMILY*

*The Black Family*, located at the Columbus Museum of Art in Columbus, Ohio, is an oil and collage painting on canvas, thirty inches by forty inches high. The painting depicts a

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<sup>18</sup> Patton, "Vincent Smith: Painter," 145-6.

<sup>19</sup> The record file for Vincent Smith's *The Black Family* at the Columbus Museum of Art dates the work to 1972 while other sources date it to 1973. The catalog from the Columbus Museum of Art exhibition from 3 Sept. 1992-28 Feb. 1993 titled *People, Places, and Things: An African-American Perspective* which includes an entry for *The Black Family*, dates the painting to 1972. However, the article by Peter A. Mark, "African Influences in Contemporary Black American Painting," *Art Voices*, January/February, 1981, 15. (also found within the record file at the Columbus Museum of Art) dates the painting to 1973.



domestic interior family scene: a father, a mother and three children. Smith distinguishes the mother in *The Black Family* from the other figures by positioning her in the forefront and center of the painting. She holds her child who is perched on her forearm. Another child hovers in front of the mother, while the eldest stands a short distance away from the mother. Smith positions the father figure in the background, with his right hand grazing the mother and child.<sup>20</sup> The figures stare at the viewer with silent dignity, except for the mother, whose eyes caress the child in her arms. The figures in the painting pose formally with the exception of the child beside the mother, who appears to be walking away from the scene, because the child's back faces the viewer. In so doing, Smith brings the formal scene of domesticity into the everyday.

Smith situates his subjects frontally within a shallow, conflated interior space whose depth is indicated by the window behind the standing family. The vase and flowers beside the windowsill are other indications of the domestic subject matter. The composition may be viewed in three vertical sections: the father stands in front of a primarily blue background; the mother and the child she holds are framed by a primarily white background; and the two standing children may be considered part of a third section, which includes the window and vase. The painting has strong primary colors subject to little or no mixing. For example, the room is illuminated by the bright yellow light from the window and the figures' eyes and lips are strong hues of blue, red, and black. Smith adds collage elements to the composition by adorning each figure with a different fabric (with the exception of the child, who stands in front of the mother). In addition, he incorporates magazine and newspaper clippings in three conspicuous places throughout the painting. While some collage elements are immediately obvious, others are partially concealed and the viewer must scrutinize to come upon them.

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<sup>20</sup> In *The Black Family*, the man appears to be the father of the family Smith paints. Later in this paper I will discuss this painting's borrowings from Renaissance Holy Family images whose male figure is often Joseph or a saint.

The painting has a boldly textured surface treatment that emphasizes the vitality of the figures and the rhythmic undercurrent of the brushstrokes. Though aggressive, this painting is, in fact, noticeably less harsh than what is typical for the artist. This relatively softer approach more suitably reflects the domestic subject matter of *The Black Family*. Smith pares down his typical painterly quality to reveal a delicateness that enhances the domestic relationship between the family members. The mother and the child she holds have significantly less impasto than the other figures. However, the father and the child whose back faces the viewer are typical of Smith's figural treatment. Their faces are significantly more layered with impasto and aggressive gestural marks. Also, the father is the only figure who has been painted with noticeable amounts of sand, which is most apparent on his teeth. These elements work with the father's austere facial expression to assert a certain unrelenting quality to him.

## **VINCENT SMITH & THE BLACK ARTS MOVEMENT**

Scholars tend to categorize Vincent Smith as a part of the Black Arts Movement because of the time period in which he worked. Smith did indeed participate in the Black Arts Movement of the sixties and seventies, an era characterized by the social and political upheaval of the Black Power Movement and the struggle for social and economic equality. During the Black Arts Movement, the artistic division of the Black Power Movement, proactive tactics of the sixties and seventies replaced non-violent black organizations of the fifties to advocate in support of Black Nationalism. Many artists belonging to this movement turned to the streets of their neighborhoods to paint murals with messages of social protest and Black empowerment. Edmund B. Gaither, in his introduction to the exhibition catalog of the exhibit he curated, titled 'Afro-American Artists: New York and Boston' (1970) wrote:

Black art...is one of two movements in the work of younger blacks which is subject to critical definition. Black art is a didactic art form arising from a strong nationalist base and characterized by its commitment to a) use the past and its heroes to inspire heroic and revolutionary ideals, b) use recent political and social events to teach recognition, control and extermination of the “enemy” and c) to project the future which the nation can anticipate after the struggle is won. In his visual language the black artist is basically a realist. Black art is a social art and it must be communicative.

Much of the subject matter of Smith’s artwork is an act of his engagement against issues of inequality. During this time, Smith’s art served as an outlet for expressing reaction to the racism and aggression his community experienced. “We were just beginning to really experience the cold racism in the arts as it affected our work, our livelihood, our sense of dignity as serious artists,” he notes. “But we persisted. Art was our light and our bible. Existentialism as our cry, all we could do was to express our outrage in our paintings and poems.”<sup>21</sup> Numerous works spoke to the ideas of the Black Arts Movement, expressing the frustrations the Black community endured during the sixties and seventies. Political prisoners, discrimination, and meetings among black leaders became recurrent subject matter in his artwork, which became a kind of ‘spokes-tool’ on behalf of the African-American community. *Report from the Caucus Room*, 1967, (**fig. 5**) is one such political painting that serves as evidence of Smith’s involvement during the height of the Black Power Movement. Likely inspired by an historical event relevant to the Black community, it demonstrates the subjugation of African-Americans at this time. In *Report from the Caucus Room*, Smith paints five African-American men in the foreground wearing suits. In the background, a clipped image from a magazine of seven African-American men who are also wearing suits is situated behind painted rows of bars reminiscent of a jail cell window. It was Smith’s intention to elevate and uplift his community by documenting the black struggle in works such as this.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> “A Painter Looks Back,” 13.

<sup>22</sup> Nancy Green, “Introduction,” *Dreams, Myths, and Realities: A Vincent Smith Retrospective*, (Ithaca: Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, January 27-March 18, 2001), 10-11 and Sharon F. Patton,

In fact, even the process of Smith's painting itself expresses the adversity that Smith and his Black community faced during this time. Less explicit, though equally engaged, are the deep, physical painting marks in works such as *Girl with Flower*, 1972, (**fig. 2**), and, *Before the Mayflower*, 1972, (**fig. 3**). They reside on the canvas as physical manifestations of the depth of the struggle against the unjust cultural limitations faced by Black artists. The era of the Black Arts Movement is characterized by museum inequalities, a lack of recognition in the art world, and political injustices. The aggressive thrashes of brushstrokes on his canvases reveal the deep pains associated with the struggle for equality.

The issue of defining Black art was central to the concerns of the Black Arts Movement, and it pervaded African-American art historical scholarship during this period. Explaining the world of Black artists producing modern art, Smith's contemporary Romare Bearden wrote that the challenge facing the development of a uniquely Black aesthetic lies in the absence of standards for criticism of Black art as well as the set socio-ideological philosophy that Black artists chose to follow.<sup>23</sup> When asked directly about his position on this central issue, Smith laid out the unmistakable connection between one's ethnic background and the resulting artistic production. He stated in response to Sharon F. Patton's inquiry as to whether there is "such a thing as Black art:"

The Blacker the better. Is there such a thing as Black art? I don't subscribe to such a thing as Black art. I think that within the Afro-American tradition there are certain things that Black sensibility would bring to the medium. But to stylistically categorize it as Black art, is not valid. Art is defined in stylistic

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*African-American Art*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 183-184. For street art murals from the Black Arts movement, see Elisa Honig Fine, *The Afro-American Artist: A Search for Identity*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1973), 198. The quotation from Edmund B. Gaither can be found in Edmund B. Gaither, "Introduction," in *Afro-American Artists: New York and Boston*, ed. Edmund B. Gaither, (Boston: The Museum School, 1970). Smith's painting titled *Report from the Caucus Room* presumably draws upon an historical moment significant to the Black community during the sixties. I extend my gratitude to Dr. Curtis Austin, Dr. Scot Brown, Dr. Hasan Kwame Jeffries, and Dr. Donna Murch, all scholars of twentieth century African-American history, who have given their time to assist in an attempt to identify the figures in the magazine clipping. Though the magazine clipping is not recognizable at this time, it would certainly be a significant item for further research in order to better understand the significance of the historical moment Smith references in *Report from the Caucus Room*.

<sup>23</sup> Romare Bearden, "The Negro Artist and Modern Art," *Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader*, ed. David Levering Lewis, (New York: Viking, 1994), 139.

terms, not in racial terms. There is no such thing as White art. There's Eskimo art because the Eskimo are people.<sup>24</sup>

Likewise, Gaither indicates the problems facing the Black Arts Movement in his introductory note for his 1970 exhibition.

At its simplest, a "black show" is an exhibition of work produced by artists whose skins are black. The term seldom connotes the presence of properties of qualities intrinsic in the work and therefore it does not act as an art historical definition. A "black show" does not belong to the same order as a "cubist show." The "black show" is a yoking together of a variety of works which are, for social and political reasons, presented under the labels "black" or "Afro-American." Such a show is thus a response to pressures growing out of racial stresses in America. At the same time, "black shows" attempt to introduce a body of material to a race-conscious public in order to force that public to recognize its existence and its quality. And like most socially motivated devices, the "black show" has its strengths and weaknesses.

The "black show" as a serious exhibition is a twentieth century invention. It began in the dual system which characterized American life early in the century, and it has continued because social and political factors still make black people a special group in the national population.<sup>25</sup>

The tendency to in separate Black artists within the art world can consequently be seen as an exclusionary practice in itself

Smith defined his art in racial terms because he was Black and working in a period complicated by racial dilemmas. The interest Smith took as an activist in the Black Arts Movement is reflected in a large body of his artwork, but does not define it as a whole. His withdrawal from association as a "Black artist" or from such a thing as "Black art" indicated his interest in participating in the broader art community and achieving acceptance within a more inclusive canon. Although Vincent Smith may not be working under the conventional aesthetic for Black art, his works do reflect the nature of both his personal and cultural

<sup>24</sup> Sharon Patton, "Vincent Smith: Painter," 153-4.

<sup>25</sup> Edmund B. Gaither, "Introduction," in *Afro-American Artists: New York and Boston*, ed. Edmund B. Gaither, (Boston: The Museum School, 1970).

identity and environment, which are undeniably linked to the pace of Black life during the 1960s and 1970s art scene.<sup>26</sup>

## PAINTING THE BLACK EXPERIENCE WITHIN THE TRAJECTORY OF ART HISTORY

*The Black Family* reveals a host of strategies with which Smith engaged in order to express both his Black experience in the 1970s and his broader artistic exposure. Smith's painting is likely a product of the influence of his frequent visits to museums and public libraries as well as his involvement in the New York art scene. With exposure to art ranging from classical Greek and Roman sculpture to Byzantine and Renaissance iconography, to works of modern art, he nonetheless translates his artistic exposure into an African-American world and language of his own. Indeed, the artistic training Smith received at the Art Students League, the Brooklyn Museum of Art, and Skowhegan School of Painting provided a traditional training in art historical conventions that informed the subject matter into which he delved. It would be too presumptuous to assert that Smith drew directly from the following particular examples of the Holy Family theme; however, it is clear from his presentation of *The Black Family* that he is drawing upon convention as a strategy to negotiate his place within art history.

The Holy Family theme, which depicts the Virgin Mary, the infant Jesus, Joseph, and often times angels, is one of the most important visual themes in European high art and its iconographic basis is well-grounded in the Christian faith through the artwork of the period. The painting, *Sistine Madonna* (**fig. 6**), from 1512-13 by the Italian High Renaissance artist

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<sup>26</sup> Valerie Cassel Oliver, "Through the Conceptual Lens: The Rise, Fall, and Resurrection of Blackness," ed. Polly Koch (exh. cat., Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, Houston 22 Jan-17 Apr 2005), 19. Conventional aesthetics for Black art relates to the Black Art Movement that emerged at this time. For further background on the Black Arts Movement see the introductory curator's statement in the 1970 exhibition catalog *Afro-American Artists: New York and Boston* (MFA, Boston).

Raphael serves as a quintessential example of the Holy Family subject. Raphael's compositional emphasis on order, balance, and harmonious color combine to convey the intimate relationship between the Madonna and the child who tenderly clings to his mother. Dictated by religious precepts, the Holy Family motif glorifies and idealizes the role of women within the family.

The compositional format, figures, and symbolism in *The Black Family* suggest a strong relationship to *Sistine Madonna*. Through the following comparisons between *The Black Family* and three paintings by Raphael, including the *Sistine Madonna*, I argue that Smith borrows from a host of traditional, Western paintings in his assemblage of *The Black Family*. Smith frames his composition with curtains that appear as fabric on one side and are abstractly painted on the opposite side. This orderly approach to framing a composition is evident in the stage-like presence of the *Sistine Madonna*. Smith places the mother in a privileged position in *The Black Family*, acting as the node between the painted figures. The Black mother holding her infant child reminds us of the Virgin Mary posed with Jesus.

Just as the Madonna wraps part of her cloak around the infant, Jesus, so too does Smith use fabric, to connect the Black mother with the child she holds. The repetition of the diagonal dotted pattern of the mother's apron on the infant's diaper suggests a deeper connection between these two figures, a connection which does not seem to be made with the other two children in the painting. We are left to wonder what role these two additional children serve in the painting, suggesting their alternate roles as angels or putti as we see in the *Sistine Madonna*. The connection between the mother and child in *The Black Family* is best compared to the Netherlandish painter Joos van Cleve's *Holy Family*, ca. 1512-13, (**fig. 7**). This painting is part of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's permanent collection, which Smith frequented. In both the Netherlandish and in Smith's painting, the mother's focus is on the child, a display of a mother's dedication towards her child, even while a family's portrait

is painted. Both of these paintings exhibit a similar tenderness in the facial expression the Madonna shows toward her child. Smith, who perhaps wants to transmit the traditions of Holy Family portraits into a modern and ethnic sensibility, displays the Black mother's love and attention towards her infant foremost in the painting.

Three other symbols pertaining to the mother link this scene of a Black family with the art historical trajectory of Holy Family scenes. An analysis of the fabric patterns the mother wears further reveals a Christian association to the painting. Three different pattern groupings make up the mother's clothing. The first grouping, which lies in the center of her apron, is a mosaic of several different ornamental patterns reminiscent of Byzantine textile design. Each ornamental pattern relates to the other through the repetition of three colors: red, gold, and black. Produced in two of the patterns is a quatrefoil medallion design, while the other patterns contain variations of a floral roundel design. This quatrefoil medallion design introduces a Christian motif within *The Black Family*. An example of this motif can be seen in the *Chasuble of Prince Michael Sutzü*, 1795, (**fig. 8**), found in the Church of the Greek Patriarchate in Istanbul. The floral design on the mother in *The Black Family* (specifically, bottom left square) also has its association with Christian iconography, as seen in an early fourteenth century panel of the Virgin offering the Christ Child a flower of similar shape (**fig. 9**) as depicted in an analysis of Byzantine influences upon Venice in an exploration of the Byzantium sphere of influence. In fact, this early fourteenth century painting was the central panel of a triptych, just as I assert that the Black mother holding her child is both the physical center and the visual focus of Vincent Smith's painting.<sup>27</sup> The second pattern grouping on the mother borders the bottom of the first grouping and consists of diagonal strips of dots of varying colors tempered by solid horizontal stripes below the dot pattern. The third pattern

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<sup>27</sup> This particular icon is Venetian influenced, but certainly typical of the Byzantine icon tradition. Maria Georgopoulou, "Venice and the Byzantine Sphere," in *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261-1557)*, ed. Helen c. Evans (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004), 497-98.



grouping surrounds the first two groupings and also covers the mother's shoulders and chest. Miniature round flowers overlay a black background in this print.

Finally, the aura of white paint above the mother's head, in Vincent Smith's work, references the orb of divine light that oft encircles the Virgin Mother's head in traditional religious paintings. The interplay between the black and the negative space of the white, which alludes to the shape of a crown in *The Black Family*, is a fascinating formal comparison with the gold crown embossed upon a white headdress in the *Sistine Madonna*. The black strip of paint with triangular forms in the negative space that overlays the white suggests the shape of such an object. We can look to the lower left corner of the *Sistine Madonna* to see a similar shape in the crown Raphael has included on the ledge in this painting. Furthermore, Smith paints two marigolds in a vase on the windowsill, one of which has fallen from its stem onto the windowsill. Like many flowers, marigolds have multiple meanings, one of which is a direct etymological reference to the Virgin Mary through the compounding of the two words "Mary's" and "gold." In fact, a Dutch hymn from the fourteenth century likened the marigold to the Virgin.<sup>28</sup> Smith translates the Christian rhetoric of the marigold by placing Smith's Holy Family painting in the everyday world through the single marigold that has fallen from its stem onto the windowsill establishing a subverted undercurrent of peril and fragility.<sup>29</sup>

It is my consideration that the father in *The Black Family* has been relegated to the back of the family portrait in accordance with Holy Family imagery to which Smith was likely exposed during his artistic training. However, Smith's rendering of such a massive figure, disproportionate from the rest of the figures present in the work of art, is puzzling. If Smith has intentionally placed the mother and child at the center of the portrait, how may we

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<sup>28</sup> Marina Heilmeyer, *The Language of Flowers* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2001), 72. Heilmeyer provides an English translation of the fourteenth century Dutch hymn, which reads as follows: "Marigold, comfort of the world, noble maid, help us towards salvation. Ave Maria."

reconcile the size of the father? It would be wise, indeed, to turn again to the *Sistine Madonna* and closely examine the kneeling figure of St. Sixtus, who is clothed in an imposing gold cloak. These two figures, both cast to the side within their respective paintings, are reasserted in importance through their physical dominance. While Smith clearly intends the viewer to focus on the mother and child theme present in *The Black Family*, he nonetheless suggests the importance of the masculine figure, thereby inserting the Holy Family theme into *The Black Family*.

Vincent Smith engages this primarily European theme in *The Black Family*, pushing the trajectory of this Holy Family into an African-American context. In so doing, Smith makes a claim for the legitimacy and inclusion of African-American culture in this elevated context of European high art. Smith contributes to the writing of art history by framing European art standards in his own terms.

### **THE ETHNIC EXPERIENCE IN *THE BLACK FAMILY***

Smith not only drew upon the Western art historical narrative but also upon the complex racial history of being African-American. He approached artwork with a pan-African sensibility, reinstating his African heritage through several visits to Africa. Recently wed to his wife Cynthia I. Linton (dates unknown), they honeymooned in 1972 in Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Nigeria. In 1973 he returned to Africa on a National Endowment of the Arts and Humanities Travel Grant and visited Kenya, Tanzania, and Ethiopia.<sup>30</sup>

It is my opinion that Smith's travels in Africa during both years in which he possibly composed *The Black Family* had a direct impact on the rendering of particular stylistic

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<sup>30</sup> The Art Galleries of Ramapo College, "Chronology," in *Vincent Smith: An Overview, Combinations, Permutation, and Transformation*, ed. Louise Pocock (Mahwah, NJ: The Art Galleries of Ramapo College, 1988), 25.

features of the painting. One primary feature in the painting is the use of warm colors. About the natural impact of color that his travels in Africa had on him, he writes, "...the landscape was all over the place, and so the yellow started coming into the painting—all those yellows. It was coming from all that sky. It's hot; it's yellow; it's orange. It just seeps in. You're not aware of it."<sup>31</sup> This quote suggests that while the marigolds in *The Black Family* might reference Christian symbolism, they can also be interpreted as a manifestation of the bold colors diffused into his work while touring Africa.<sup>32</sup> The orange seems to refer to the intensity of colors in the vibrant landscape of Africa during his travels there. The vibrant yellow light that originates from the window could be traced to this same origin.

Another feature that comes out of Smith's search for his African legacy is the pronounced facial features of the family members in the portrait. While all of the faces have a typical African mask-like appearance, the mouth and nose of the father in *The Black Family* has a strong resemblance to an African mask. Additionally, the figure is broad-shouldered and prominently positioned within the picture plane, despite its position in the background. These features convey a strong masculine contrast to the mother and child presented in an intimate manner. In a description of another of his paintings entitled *This One's for Doc* (**fig. 10**), Samella Lewis establishes a link between Smith's African roots and his stylistic representation. The faces on this group of male and female figures are depicted with well-defined noses and overall angularity in facial features and expressions, redolent of African ceremonial masks.<sup>33</sup> The masks in both *The Black Family* and *This One's for Doc* are clearly based on his understanding and survey of African art he had been exposed to during his journeys. As a source of comparison, we may turn to the *chihongo* mask found in Chokwe,

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<sup>31</sup> Sharon Fitzgerald, "Vincent Smith: Sage, Bohemian, Prince," in *American Visions*, 14, 3 (June/July 1999): 27.

<sup>32</sup> One may also read the flower, which has fallen from its stem, as a hibiscus, rather than a marigold. In this case, the flower should be analyzed in terms of its African connections, rather than the Western reading that I have provided.

<sup>33</sup> Samella Lewis, *African American Art and Artists* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 195.

Angola and in the Republic of Congo (**fig. 11**) that emphasizes the pieced and carved facial quality similar to the faces in Vincent Smith's above two paintings. The *chihongo* mask, in particular, "stands for prosperity and male power."<sup>34</sup> Though the chances that Smith came across this exact mask are minimal, it nonetheless offers a specific example of the mask-like features related by Lewis, giving an example of how an African-American artist incorporated African art, and thus his roots, into his work. Such a depiction shows Smith's attempt to connect a coherent ancestral and cultural lineage with his current social reality.

Smith discussed the importance of uncovering one's African roots in a 1972 interview published in *African Progress*: "The upheavals in the 60's [*sic*] brought an awareness and cohesiveness to people and they began to dig in more to find out just what their roots are and where they are going."<sup>35</sup> This was an important act for a population which had been dispersed from its homeland in Africa and had come to live as a part of the African Diaspora in America.<sup>36</sup> Due to the African slave trade, displaced Africans in America developed a culture distinct from their African heritage through a process of retention, adoption, and finally, fusion. Africans retained their original identity as Africans by continuing to "speak and practice their native languages and traditions...sang and danced as their cultures had taught them." Coupled with the culture of retention is that of the culture of adoption, which consisted of "a degree of accommodation to local conditions...They learned European languages and culture; in time some converted to Christianity."<sup>37</sup> The progeny of African slaves, like Smith, born in America, struggled to recover many aspects of their familial and

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<sup>34</sup> Iris Hahner, "Catalog Entry for Face Mask *Chihongo*." In *Spirits Speak: A Celebration of African Masks*, ed. Peter Stepan (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2005), 176. It would be interesting to examine if Smith's depiction of the father in *The Black Family* in such an imposing manner was done as a way to invite viewers to consider, in addition to the central importance of the mother and child, the significance of the male figure in the family. It would seem, in this case, that he is making a claim for the mutually dependent roles of the female and male figures in domestic family life.

<sup>35</sup> Vincent Smith, interview by Dorothy Gloster, "Art in the Black American Community: A Foremost Afro-American Artist Discusses His Work," *African Progress*, March/April 1972, 32.

<sup>36</sup> Joseph E. Harris, "The Dynamics of the Global African Diaspora," in *The African Diaspora*, ed. Alusine Jalloh and Stephen Maizlish (Arlington, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 1996), 7.

<sup>37</sup> Harris, "The Dynamics of the Global African Diaspora," 12.

cultural heritage, which had often been distorted or lost during transmission.<sup>38</sup> Ultimately the retention of native African culture and the adoption of the local culture in their new societies led to what, in 1903, W.E.B. DuBois termed “double consciousness.”<sup>39</sup>

...this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of other, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,— an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two reconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.<sup>40</sup>

This fusion of Africans' native and adoptive countries is further described by DuBois: “The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, — this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self.”<sup>41</sup> Thus, the hybridity of African-American art contains both African and Anglican aesthetics. Vincent Smith translated this concept of “double consciousness” in the later half of the twentieth century as a modernist African-American painter on a journey of personal and collective cultural identity.

On a deeper level, the face masks in Vincent Smith's paintings have multiple meanings, all with psychological implications. The mask emphasizes the strategies utilized by African-Americans throughout their history in dealing with subservience forced upon them. This is a topic of much interest among scholars of African-American history. During enslavement and segregation, the dominant racial ideology enforced Black subservience to whites. During the period of slavery, Blacks put on an obedient, subservient face, but behind their façade they learned to read, write, or perform their jobs with subtle acts of resistance. Colin A. Palmer, in his essay discussing a reconsidered look at slavery in America notes, “The most sustained struggle against slavery took place in the heads of its victims, in their

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<sup>38</sup> Colin A. Palmer, “Rethinking American Slavery,” in *The African Diaspora*, ed. Alusine Jalloh and Stephen Maizlish (Arlington, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 1996), 92.

<sup>39</sup> Harris, “The Dynamics of the Global African Diaspora,” 12.

<sup>40</sup> William Edward Burghardt DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Millwood, NY: Kraus-Thompson Organization Limited, 1973), 3.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

battle against becoming psychological lepers or the compliant robots that their masters desired.”<sup>42</sup> Examples of “everyday forms of resistance” were: theft, foot dragging, short-term flight, and feigning illness.”<sup>43</sup> African-American poet and scholar Harryette Mullen asserts how slave narratives provide us with insight into the forms of psychological rebellions:

The texts of ex-slave narratives signal a decisive movement of literate African Americans toward self-empowerment through the tools and technologies of literacy that are productive of bourgeois subjectivity, and away from the degradation imposed by slavery and compulsory illiteracy. The zealous pursuit of literacy embodied by ex-slave narrators, particularly Douglass, is an astute response to the disastrous assault on the collective cultural identities of African captives whose orally transmitted forms of knowledge brought from their various ethnic groups had been submerged, fragmented, or rendered irrelevant within a dominant bourgeois white culture that characterized whatever remained within slave culture of coherent African traditional aesthetic...<sup>44</sup>

In his narrative, Frederick Douglass wrote that during his master’s absences from the house, he secretly taught himself how to write using a copy-book that belonged to his master’s son in order to emerge from his illiterate slave status.<sup>45</sup> Another example of subversive acts of psychological resistance can be found in quilts which were often coded with messages to assist slaves escaping along the Underground Railroad. This speculative understanding of slave quilts has been gleaned from oral histories alone due to illiteracy among slaves. One such quilt that exemplifies this notion of coded messaging is the replica plantation quilt of Elizabeth Talford Scott, 1980, (**fig. 12**). It is thought that the stitched constellation in this quilt acted as a trail guide for slaves to escape and that the arbitrary stitching was actually a topographical map of a plantation, stitched to scale. Quilts like these were hung in the

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<sup>42</sup> Colin A. Palmer, “Rethinking American Slavery,” 89.

<sup>43</sup> Stephanie M. H. Camp, “Introduction,” in *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*, ed. Stephanie M. H. Camp (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 2.

<sup>44</sup> Harryette Mullen, “African Signs and Spirit Writing,” in *The Black Studies Reader*, eds. Jacqueline Bobo and others (New York: Routledge, 2004), 284.

<sup>45</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave*, ed. Benjamin Quarles, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), 71.

windows of slave homes for escaping slaves to read along their journey towards freedom.<sup>46</sup>

These subversive strategies of cultural survival continued well past the era of slavery into the twentieth century as Blacks continued to exist in a culture marked by racial inequality and prejudices. Though many years removed from slavery, Blacks dealt with issues of equality and fought for civil rights during the period in which Vincent Smith lived. Vincent Smith's interest in painting was largely driven by the desire for African-American legitimacy and inclusion in the trajectory of art history, which he described as a "moral obligation" towards his community.<sup>47</sup> This is a visual strategy that reveals the pressure of survival, legitimacy, and existence.

An African mask also illustrates the difficulties African-Americans face in terms of their identity. The loss of one's tribal heritage due to the slave trade challenged many African-Americans who sought to tie their identity to their non-Western ancestry. African-Americans were left with the task of recouping the integrity of their lineage. Like many African-Americans of his time, Smith gained a sense of his roots by traveling throughout Africa. As a Black man distanced from his original roots by several generations, the African legacy he could recover was one linked to a collective African narrative and therefore derived from a pan-African approach. The depiction of generalized mask-like faces discussed earlier is a reflection of Smith's pan-African, hybrid approach to defining his cultural heritage. The mask in *The Black Family* is a projection of racial identity and thus Vincent Smith expresses the embedded duality and tension in African-American identity by using the mask motif.

Vincent Smith draws upon his perceived ethnic roots and racial identity, just as Bearden writes that "the Negro artist...must enter wholeheartedly into the situation which he wishes to convey. The artist must be the medium through which humanity expresses itself. In

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<sup>46</sup> "The Underground Railroad and the Secret Codes of Antebellum Slave Quilts," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 46 (Winter 2004, 2005), 44, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/stable/4133668> (accessed February 16, 2009).

<sup>47</sup> Vincent Smith, interview by Dorothy Gloster, "Art in the Black American Community: A Foremost Afro-American Artist Discusses His Work," 34,

this sense the greatest artists have faced the realities of life, and have been profoundly social.”<sup>48</sup> *The Black Family* successfully depicts precisely this notion: Smith has chosen to depict something personal for public view and utilizes his identity, gender, and roots to frame a family portrait. As former curator of the Whitney Museum of American Art, Robert M. Doty wrote, “Whether bitter or jubilant, the initial impetus for taking up brush or pencil, stone or metal, is often personal experience and its emotional condition.”<sup>49</sup> *The Black Family* engages the tradition of high art with both a personal and a racial inner monologue.

## ARTISTIC INFLUENCES ON VINCENT SMITH

Much of what we understand of Vincent Smith’s style and motivation for painting is contextual, based on comparison with his contemporaries. Smith did recall his artistic influences, both from Black artists who preceded him and concurrent influences, citing Jacob Lawrence, Charles White, Archibald Motley, and Romare Bearden. In particular, Jacob Lawrence became a personal friend and mentor to the impressionable Smith.<sup>50</sup> John Canaday writes in the *New York Times* that Smith’s work embodies “the gentleness of Jacob Lawrence and the aggressive indignation of Benny Andrews.”<sup>51</sup> Both of these qualities are evident in *The Black Family*: the sharp angularity of the scene’s brushstrokes is complemented by the softened expressions and gestures of the figures in the painting.

Patton’s 1990 interview with Vincent Smith highlights the stylistic and educational influence Jacob Lawrence had on him.<sup>52</sup> Born in 1917, Lawrence worked in Harlem and is well known for his WPA project, *The Migration of the Negro* (**fig. 13**) narrative painting

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<sup>48</sup> Bearden, 141.

<sup>49</sup> Doty, *Contemporary Black Artists* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1971), 12.

<sup>50</sup> Patton, “Vincent Smith: Painter,” 146-47.

<sup>51</sup> Canaday.

<sup>52</sup> Patton, “Vincent Smith: Painter,” 146-47.



series from 1939-41.<sup>53</sup> A socially and historically conscious series, *The Migration of the Negro* serves as a history lesson that chronicles personal, family, and community experiences during the wave of Black migration from the South to the North preceding World War I. Lawrence's works exhibit a simplified style and primary color palette,<sup>54</sup> similar to the color scheme in Smith's *The Black Family*, particularly in the strong use of blue, red, yellow, and black. The majority of Lawrence's works are characterized by a primary color scheme, a style integral to the narrative, educational quality of his works. Another of Lawrence's works, *Home Chores* (**fig. 14**) depicts a woman washing dishes as a representation of the jobs some African-American women, like Lawrence's mother, labored at in order to provide for their children.<sup>55</sup> Lawrence incorporated the same sense of light concentrated through a strong shade of yellow, as in Smith's *The Black Family*. The yellow highlights the woman washing dishes in Lawrence's work just as it draws attention to the mother and her children in *The Black Family*. Deep blues and reds also highlight various aspects of both works. Lawrence's style is direct, allowing greater accessibility to the disquieting subject matter for the purpose of education. This "gentleness" of palette is the product of Lawrence's economy of color linked stylistically to *The Black Family* by Vincent Smith.

Conceptually, we can see a direct link from Lawrence to Smith. Lawrence paints *The Migration of the Negro* series so that African-Americans could take ownership of their history in the same way that they could take ownership of the Christian Holy Family theme in Smith's *The Black Family*. Smith looks at his subject matter with integrity and allows his community to be connected to a religious tradition. Lawrence wanted his work to serve as an educational tool for the African-American community. He hoped that his work would reveal the integrity of contemporary Black life. He portrays the dignity of a washerwoman in *Home*

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<sup>53</sup> Patton, *African-American Art*, 154-56.

<sup>54</sup> Lewis, 129-31.

<sup>55</sup> Leslie King-Hammond, "Inside-Outside, Uptown-Downtown: Jacob Lawrence and the Aesthetic Ethos of the Harlem Working-Class Community," in *Over the Line: The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence*, ed. Peter T. Nesbett and Michelle Dubois (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000): 81.

*Chores*, alluding to a healthy functioning family sharing a conceptual similarity to Smith's portrayal of harmonious Black family life.

Also mentioned in Patton's interview with Smith as an artistic influence on Smith is socially active artist Benny Andrews, born in 1930. Working at the same time as Smith, Andrews incorporated collage into his work to produce a harsher, rawer style. Andrews' artistic proclamation of his identity in this medium is best expressed in his oil and collage *Portrait of a Collagist* (**fig. 15**) from 1989. Andrews paints himself at work in his studio to reveal the process so integral to his interest in surface texture. The box of rags and fabrics located in the lower left corner of the painting is an indication of his practice of collaging fabrics within oil on canvas fields, producing, for example, the collaged zipper pockets on the left pant leg.<sup>56</sup> The influences on Smith, from Lawrence and Andrews extend beyond superficial stylistic choices. As art historian Donald Kuspit has written, "collage implies scorn for conventional notions of art...Much as collage undermines the 'rightness' of the picture, blackness undermines white "self"-righteousness."<sup>57</sup> The collage activates the surface of the canvas, enabling these artists to expand upon the traditional notions of painting. These artists explored such stylistic processes, as collage, as venues through which to express their racial and social identity.

Smith's style is heavily influenced by Romare Bearden's collage technique, for which Bearden is best known.<sup>58</sup> Bearden incorporated images from discarded magazines onto large works prominently displayed for the Black community, as seen in his 1964 collage titled *Prevalence of Ritual* (**fig. 16**). Similar to Bearden, Smith's pieces are flat and lack linear perspective. Both Bearden and Smith worked alongside the surrounding jazz environment

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<sup>56</sup> Judd Tully, "A Collage of Painterly Roots," in *Folk: The Art of Benny and George Andrews*, ed. Patricia P. Bladon (Memphis: Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, 1990): 30.

<sup>57</sup> Benny Andrews, *The Collages of Benny Andrews: [September 18, 1988- February 26, 1989, an Exhibition]* (New York, N.Y.: Studio Museum in Harlem, 1988) quoted in Patton, *African-American Art*, 190-3.

<sup>58</sup> Patton, "Vincent Smith: Painter," 147.

and their works produce a rhythmic depth where it formally lacks depth.<sup>59</sup> Bearden's works are autobiographical narratives just as with Vincent Smith in *The Black Family*. On a deeper level the fragmentation of Bearden's pieces reflect the fractured quality of the lives of African-Americans of his generation.<sup>60</sup> Carroll Greene, Jr., former curator at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, wrote that in Romare Bearden's work "we see not only fascinating designs and juxtapositions of forms and colors; we also get penetrating 'slices of life,' people and their many moods... Long an advocate of using the materials out of one's own experience, the very bedrock of Bearden's art is the life style of the black community... Bearden has lifted the collage to new heights and so he has. And in so doing, he has also lifted the art of black people to new heights."<sup>61</sup> Bearden's collaging, cutting, and tearing, which portrays the fractured quality of African-American lives of his generation, contrasts with the impact of Vincent Smith's collage method on the surface. Smith's collaged surface speaks against the fractured nature of Bearden's style, illustrating that the family is the coherent site of an otherwise complicated experience of African-American life. The fabric, collage, and autobiographical elements of *The Black Family* and Smith's other works are clearly a foil of Romare Bearden and the direct influence of other Black artists that inspired him to draw his life on canvas.

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<sup>59</sup> Like Smith, Bearden was active in the jazz community; this jazz influence comes across in many of both their works.

<sup>60</sup> Sharon F. Patton, *Master Paintings from the Butler Institute of American Art*, ed. Irene Sweetkind (New York: H.N. Abrams in association with the Butler Institute of American Art, 1994), 312-13.

<sup>61</sup> Greene, Jr.

## THE BLACK FAMILY WITHIN A MODERNIST FRAMEWORK

### The Impact of Collage

A closer look at *The Black Family* brings the viewer closer to the subtleties of the collage elements within the painting as well as the artist's social mindset during the 1970s. The surface evokes a harmonious patching together of African-American family life through the evident layering of traditional media, such as oil paint and non-traditional fabrics and news print. However, three locations on the picture field may indicate a different reading of the African-American family portrait. Two newspaper clippings, located above the mother's head and at the lower side of the window, with headlines reading "Modern Living" and "Fighting Chance," as well as magazine clippings of skeletons and African-American head cut-outs of graduates, may be overlooked in a holistic reading of the painting. Smith's technique of incorporating newspaper within a work of art recalls Picasso's and Braque's synthetic cubist *papiers collés* works from the early twentieth century, which asserted a modernist sensibility into the art historical tradition. As Clement Greenberg, one of the most eminent critics of modern art, writes, "Collage was a major turning point in the evolution of Cubism, and therefore a major turning point in the whole evolution of modernist art in this century."<sup>62</sup>

Art historian Diane Waldman, in her research for the 1998 exhibition at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York entitled "Aspects of Collage, Assemblage, and the Found Object in Twentieth-century Art," noted, *papiers collés* were "an outgrowth of...experiments with illusionism," a type of reexamination of space on the picture plane.<sup>63</sup> Collage became a means to dispense with both the illusionism and flatness of earlier painting in order to arrive at three-dimensional, sculptural effects in a painting, which were first

<sup>62</sup> Clement Greenberg, "Collage" (1959), in *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 70.

<sup>63</sup> Diane Waldman, *Collage, Assemblage, and the Found Object*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992), 22.

avored by Picasso in late 1913 or early 1914 and became known as synthetic cubism. Artists mixed sand and other substances with their paint in order to distinguish it from flat, illusionistic paintings.<sup>64</sup> All of these techniques resonate in many of Smith's paintings. In *The Black Family*, these techniques include the granular effect of the father's mouth achieved by mixing paint with sand, the magazine and newspaper clippings, and the pastiche of fabrics that coat various areas of the canvas.

Vincent Smith meshes linguistics with visuality through his inclusion of newspaper clippings in *The Black Family*, just as Picasso has done in his 1912 collage *Glass and Bottle of Suze* (**fig. 17**).<sup>65</sup> The artists contemporize both these collage works, activating a sense of temporality. For Picasso, the incorporation of newspapers references café culture and the tumultuous world that had just gone through an all-consuming war. For Smith, the newspapers, set in a realm of domesticity, represent the everyday and the time period in which Smith worked. The newspapers place the painting in an entirely historical moment, a time that may be characterized as a breeding ground for change and progress for the Black community.

Assuming that these particular clippings were intentionally placed by the artist, the following reading, on both an aesthetic level and a literal (temporal) level, may be made. These two levels, the temporal and the aesthetic, are intertwined; the newspapers reveal a sense of modernity in which non-traditional elements were incorporated as art into the picture field. A collage that includes newspaper engages non-traditional media and becomes an act of liberation from the structured artistic hierarchy of high art. The newspaper component of the

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<sup>64</sup> The analytic cubism Picasso and Braque explored may be considered in this reach towards the sculptural and multi-dimensional byproducts, as their cubist facets were a means to arrive at sculptural form upon a two-dimensional surface. For the reference to three-dimensionality and sculptural effects in a painting, see Greenberg, 71. For a reference to Greenberg's dating of synthetic cubism see page 78. See page 74 for Greenberg's discussion of blending paint with other substances to arrive at granular, textured surface.

<sup>65</sup> I would like to acknowledge Dr. Myroslava Mudrak's lecture on October, 13, 2009 in Twentieth Century European Art: 1914-1945 at The Ohio State University for introducing me to the concept of meshing linguistics with visuality in painting.

collage within *The Black Family* has been enmeshed within the painting. It neither characterizes the entire painting nor obstructs the overall visuality of the work, unlike Picasso's *Glass and Bottle of Suze*, which is defined primarily by the technique of layering newspapers, activating the objectness of the two-dimensional plane. *The Black Family*, on the other hand, is defined by no one medium in particular. In fact, the layering of one medium atop a different medium, as in thick layers of paint overlaid by a magazine clipping, which in turn is overlaid with strokes of brushwork, acts as an equalizer between media, rendering one medium of no greater importance than another. Therefore, newspaper within a collage, like Smith's work, is one aspect that characterizes some modern collage art and is just one part of a rich and active surface where all media are made tantamount to one another on a two-dimensional surface.

The collage in *The Black Family* is significant, as it physically layers the picture field and symbolically contributes to layers of meaning. Smith has painted a picture of ideal Black family life, embedding within it social and racial commentary. Smith may be questioning whether the Black family has a "fighting chance" amidst a tumultuous social reality of "modern living" during this time period. Alternatively, Smith may be painting a moral lesson for the Black community, appropriate for the religious tone of the entire work. Through Smith's work, he may subtly be warning his community that, without strong family ties, his community does not have a "fighting chance" of overcoming the harsh social and racial environment; it is a *memento mori* reminding his viewers that a strong basis in faith and family can prevent life from tearing apart at the seams. The skeleton cut-outs, which refer to those who have died in the struggle to achieve in life, contrasts with the head cut-out of graduates who represent the hope for a future. These cut-outs are in a direct horizontal line below the vase and marigolds. Here, we may apply a second reading on the meaning of

marigolds: one of grief and sorrow.<sup>66</sup> One flower still stands, while one has fallen from its stem, reiterating the motif of the past and the hopeful future. Though the marigolds glow brightly, reinforcing the vibrant orange color that deeply impacted the artist on his travels to Africa, they stand as a memorial to his grief and anguish-stricken community. Smith speaks directly to the African-American community who seeks to negotiate a forward direction in issues of race and equality. The newspaper clippings and skeletons reveal the tension and stress of the collage process that is nearly overcome by the harmony between the family in the collage.

### **Smith and Primitivism in Modern Art**

Picasso's interest in the "objectness" of an art surface also extended to sculpture. Perhaps this interest is an outgrowth of cubism, where he took a keen and studied interest in capturing all facets and angles of an object, and evolved into making fully-fleshed three-dimensional sculpture. Picasso did participate in the trend towards incorporating the formal qualities of "primitive" African sculpture into the Western artistic sensibility, which provides a fascinating parallel to Smith, who also looked to the African art historical tradition to draw inspiration. It may be argued that the formal influence that this had on Picasso derives from an aesthetic vision, whereas Smith sought out African art as a way to recover his own cultural and ancestral lineage, thereby incorporating this aesthetic tradition into his art. I am by no means claiming that Smith's artistic practice of collage was meant to further or pay homage to Picasso and other cubists. Rather, as Abstract Expressionist artist Robert Motherwell (1915-1991) noted, "Every intelligent painter carves the whole culture of modern painting in his head," meaning that artistic elements evolve from a source, increasing our synthesis of the

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<sup>66</sup> Ernst and Johanna Lehner, *Folklore and Symbolism of Flowers, Plants and Trees* (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1960), 120. Additionally, marigolds also symbolize disquietude and jealousy.

trajectory of art history and our conceptions of artistic practice and technique.<sup>67</sup> As an African-American artist, Smith wanted to be seen not only as a Black artist but also as part of a larger art historical legacy.

### Expanding the Parameters of Aesthetic Norms

The artwork of Jean Dubuffet (1901-1985) serves as another example of a modernist artist who explored new materials in art in order to arrive at the innocent rawness of the artistic psyche. He abandoned traditional paint and paintbrush and worked with asphalt, cement, sand, glass, coal dust, glue, pebbles, thread, soil, and hair, to produce heavily textured works of art, much like Vincent Smith's incorporation of non-traditional media within a traditional canvas field. Dubuffet is most noted for elevating the creative expressions of societal outcasts like the mentally ill prison inmates, known as *art brut*.<sup>68</sup> An astonishing likeness exists between the mouth of the father in *The Black Family* and the mouth of the figure in Jean Dubuffet's 1947 painting, *Dhotel in Apricot Color* (**fig. 18**). The hard-edged layers of paint coated on the father as well as his peculiar mouth constructed through a mixture of paint and sand draws viewers to conceive of the father as having an austere expression. The mouth, which has been stylized in an almost cartoon-like manner, sharply contrasts with the placid expression of the mother's face, as well as those of the children in the scene. While the identity of the father figure in *The Black Family* is not clear to us, perhaps Dubuffet's interest in arriving at a rawness of character through art can help elucidate the nature of the father figure, and, furthermore, a sense of masculinity in direct contrast to the domestic, feminine, matriarchal focus of the mother and child. Smith's contribution to

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<sup>67</sup> Catalogue for *Robert Motherwell: The School of New York*. Beverly Hills: Frank Perls Gallery, 1951, quoted in William C. Seitz, *The Art of Assemblage*, (New York: Plantin Press, 1961), 72.

<sup>68</sup> Reinhold Heller, "'A Swan Only Sings at the Moment It Disappears': Jean Dubuffet and Art at the Edge of Non-Art," in *Jean Dubuffet: Forty Years of His Art*, ed. Richard A. Born (The University of Chicago, The David and Alfred Smart Gallery, 1984), 21-24.



modern art through his own style “represents the range of Smith’s works and confirms him as a modernist in his willingness to explore new techniques and experiment with media.”<sup>69</sup>

## THE STRATEGIES FOR INCLUSION IN ART

Vincent Smith painted *The Black Family* during the same decade that the Pattern and Decoration Movement vied for recognition in the world of high art. Up to this point, the art world defined itself by the “modernist tradition that scorned the decorative” and thus, had largely perceived the decorative arts as a form of “low art” that was not deserving of the same critical attention given to high art defined by European standards. By 1972 artists working in styles that drew upon the decorative arts had asserted themselves in the established art world, subject to the same levels of criticism as other artistic styles. The Pattern and Decoration Movement, or Pattern Painting, incorporated the previously perceived “gendered” form of art into mainstream art movements.<sup>70</sup> The Pattern and Decoration Movement was excluded from considerations of mainstream art much in the same way that African-American artwork was excluded from the mainstream art community. Without more elaborate information on Vincent Smith, it is difficult to make the claim that the Pattern Painting Movement had a direct influence on the collage nature that emerges in Vincent Smith’s painting *The Black Family*. However, what can be argued is that the strategy Smith uses to make claims for the inclusion of the Black experience in art parallels the similar strategies successfully employed by the Pattern and Decoration Movement.

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<sup>69</sup> Sharon F. Patton, “About the Artist,” in *Passages East/West: A Retrospective—1964-1989* (Schenectady, NY: Schenectady Museum, 1989), 8.

<sup>70</sup> “Gendered” art is considered handicraft work typically found in the domestic realm such as patterned fabrics, quilting, decorative furniture, and domestic handicrafts. Norma Broude, “The Pattern and Decoration Movement,” *The Power of Feminist Art*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, 208-225. (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1994), 208.

Evolving from a reaction to the preceding Minimalist Movement in art, the Pattern and Decoration movement sought to reinforce the materiality discouraged during the restrictive period of Minimalism.<sup>71</sup> Art critic and writer Amy Goldin outlined in her 1975 *Artforum* article, “Patterns, Grids, and Painting,” the vision and practical issues in the practice of pattern decoration, thereby legitimizing it as a recognized art form. She appeals to the dialectic nature of this kind of craft, which carries both a sense of the decorative and an appeal to the rational, claiming, “Pattern carries the aura of craft and contrivance, although many individual aspects of pattern—its affinities with number, rationality, mechanical production and depersonalized imagery—have been reclaimed for art.”<sup>72</sup> *Silver and Blue* by Kim McConnel (**fig. 19**) is one example of decorative artworks that challenged Minimalism and reinforced materiality through large-scale wall hangings made from commercially printed textiles cut into strips, painted over, and then sewn together.<sup>73</sup> Miriam Schapiro, a founding member of the Pattern and Decoration Movement and a trained artist in the modern school, broke from the conventions of this movement because of her fascination with the decorative and the ornamental function in high art.<sup>74</sup> Schapiro titled her work as “femme- a conflation of painting and collage with women’s work, seen from a feminist point of view.”<sup>75</sup> *Curtains*, from 1972 (**fig. 20**), is one example of her work that reinforces the materiality of the work of art. Participating artists in the Pattern and Decoration Movement such as these two incorporated the traditional “female” domestic arts into collages that, by the 1970s, were displayed as significant contribution to fine art in prominent exhibitions throughout the U.S.<sup>76</sup> One such exhibit was the 1977 “Pattern Painting” show held in Long Island City and organized by curator John Perreault. His contribution to *Artforum* in November, 1977, asserts

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>72</sup> Amy Goldin, “Patterns, Grids, and Painting,” *Artforum* 14 (September 1975), 50.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>74</sup> See Leffingwell, 130 for information about Schapiro’s flagship role in the Pattern and Decoration Movement. See Broude, 208 for a reference to Schapiro’s shift from working with traditional to here feminist artwork.

<sup>75</sup> Leffingwell, 130.

<sup>76</sup> Edward Leffingwell, “Schapiro’s Material Girls,” *Art in America*, 94, no. 8 (September 2006): 130.

the veracity of pattern painting because of its antecedents in art history as well as the non-Minimalist, decorative qualities that define the works of art.<sup>77</sup> The materials these artists incorporated in their art sharply contrasted with the materials used in previous artistic movements, but their modernist art mentality was no different from artists who broke with convention earlier in the twentieth century. Their art demanded that the viewer recognize the artist's depth of expression and breadth of creativity that transformed and refocused the energy of the art world into recognizing that new materials could be part of our conception of what art may be. Perreault writes, "Whether painterly or non-painterly, floral, or totally abstract, pattern painting challenges accepted notions of the division between fine art and the decorative arts."<sup>78</sup> We find that this was indeed the major contribution of the feminist arts, activating new forms of art that had been traditionally relegated to the women's sphere as having equal integrity in the art world. Art critic Lucy Lippard describes this contribution: "they have brought over into high art the use of "low" traditional art forms such as embroidery, sewing, and china painting; or that they have changed the face of central imagery and pattern painting, of layering, fragmentation, and collage..."<sup>79</sup> This very concept, a broadening of the canon of art history, is what Linda Nochlin advocates in her landmark essay, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" Her article criticized the tiresome exclusion of women as eminent artists because of the limitations and constraints within the institution of art.<sup>80</sup>

These two concepts, a material response to Minimalism and the expansion of the art historical canon leading to the establishment of collage in painting as part of the high art rhetoric, resonate with visual strategies employed by Vincent Smith in *The Black Family*. Smith's painting shares its feminizing theme and artistic practice with the Pattern and

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<sup>77</sup> John Perreault, "Issues in Pattern Painting," *Artforum* 16 (November 1977), 33.

<sup>78</sup> Perreault, 33.

<sup>79</sup> Lucy Lippard, "Sweeping Exchanges: The Contribution of Feminism to the Art of the 1970s," *Art Journal* 40 no. 1/2 (Autumn-Winter, 1980), 362.

<sup>80</sup> Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?," *ArtNews* 69 no. 9 (January 1971).

Decoration Movement. Though Smith consciously worked to soften the painterly surface, the additive thickness in the surface quality of both the oil paint and fabric is readily apparent in *The Black Family*. This style is a clear reflection of the aggression and tension associated with racial issues at the time. Its materiality situates the painting's presence as a Black family portrait in the mainstream art world and into consideration as high art. Smith breaks down the preexisting notions of his identity as a Black artist. He incorporates a style not only from the Black art world with which scholars often associate him, but also attunes his style and subject matter to a continuation of the mother and child theme as well as the concurrent Pattern and Decoration Movement. The Pattern and Decoration Movement's strategies for gender inclusion mirror Smith's interest in incorporating traditional African-American techniques for inclusion in high art.

Smith's multicultural background encouraged him to dissolve, through the media in *The Black Family*, the cultural constructs of Black artists. No longer confined to slave art or folk art, Smith is an integral part of the broader currents in American art. He furthers this mainstream movement in art by formulating his painting in autobiographical, multiethnic terms. The Pattern and Decoration Movement similarly enabled its artistic production by breaking away from the cultural construction that the decorative art style be confined to the domestic realm alone.<sup>81</sup> The decorative arts no longer rallied around a single-gendered, Western aesthetic. Rather, both men and women participated in this movement.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, its classification extended beyond the Western aesthetic realm into a variety of cultural sources, including Islamic, Celtic, and Hispanic, much as Smith draws upon multicultural influences.<sup>83</sup>

It is my contention that Smith's incorporation of fabric onto the canvas of *The Black Family* is done in the interest of merging non-traditional art materials into a canvas, which

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<sup>81</sup> Broude, 219.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 220.

presents a traditional theme. A closer look at the major parts of the painting that are covered with fabric is important in order to better understand why Smith worked from a collage approach. Embellished on the father is a fabric closely associated with Indian floral and paisley designs. The flower is a salient pattern in Indian art and is often referred to as *buta*, which literally means “flower.”<sup>84</sup> I offer an Indian *buta* pattern for comparison, in order to link the fabric on the father with an ethnic context (**fig. 21**). The innermost pattern of the *buta* on the father’s garment is an oval shape, which is wide at one end and whose other end has been pinched and curved inward. This is most commonly known as a paisley design, whose pattern is widely used in India (**fig. 22**). A shawl from Kashmir from 1830 contains the same paisley shape found on the inside of the *buta* on the father’s garment.

Though the floral roundel on the first pattern grouping, which lies in the center of the mother’s apron, has already been contextualized in comparison to patterns reminiscent of Byzantine textile design, I offer two more examples that associate the floral roundel with patterns derived from India. A fragment of Indian cotton found at Fostat and dating to the thirteenth century depicts what are described as “large, scalloped rosettes” that serves as one example from an international source (**fig. 23**). A second pattern, found on an Indian sari dated from before 1958, contains concentric floral roundel patterns similar to the row of horizontal roundels also found in the first pattern grouping on the mother’s apron (**fig. 24**). Both of these examples further support the parallel between the strategies Vincent Smith employed and those of the feminist movement to engage with non-Western patterns as another way to engage pattern in their artwork.

The child who appears to be exiting the scene is clothed in a green shirt with yellow and red streaks, and a woven, plaid skirt. Indeed, an investigation of origins of fabrics may prove futile when one considers the extensive exchange of material culture between countries

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<sup>84</sup> Blenda Femenias and Joan A. Raducha, *Two Faces of South Asian Art: Textiles and Painting* (Madison: The Regents of the University of Wisconsin System, 1984), 14.

that has occurred throughout history. Identification of the exact origins of each fabric proves of less import than the impact of the fabric's implications within the context of *The Black Family*. An exploration of the associations between the fabrics he incorporates and their origins suggests Smith's outreach towards a broader body of visual culture than his own African-American community.

Without the confines of cultural constructions that seeped into the decorative arts, the Pattern and Decorative Movement allowed for encompassing of a broader range of materials, artists, and themes into the heretofore unattainable level of high art.

## CONCLUSION

The period in which Vincent Smith worked to paint *The Black Family* is one that negotiated multicultural elements, gender, identity, and the disempowerment of classification and objectification in the arts. As Bearden writes, "...the Negro artist should express personal sentiment in artistic expression in order to convey something 'profoundly social.'" <sup>85</sup> Just as Miriam Schapiro drew on domestic materials familiar to her in order to create her "femme" artworks, Smith also "femme" his painting using his own pictorial language as a Black expressionist artist working in a socially and racially engaged environment and being conscious of the Pattern and Decoration Movement. At the same time, *The Black Family* is insistent on its culture: Vincent Smith portrays a socially ideal image in *The Black Family*. This family portrait recovers a neglected component of the trajectory of Holy Family images. Vincent Smith, painting with a "black sensibility," depicts a scene that reflects autobiographical aspects of his African-American identity. Additionally, the nature of the time period provides us with something that can be distinguished from the trajectory of

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<sup>85</sup> Bearden, 141.

Western art's historical currents. Instead of maintaining the mindset that only high art deserves recognition in major art displays, the emergence of Vincent Smith's collaged, domestic-influenced painting merges the ideals of high and decorative arts. Rather than projecting a linear and isolated approach to art, Vincent Smith's *The Black Family* enforces a host of social, historical, and racial aspects that contribute to our understanding of this celebrated painting and the broader context that the *The Black Family* illuminates.

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Figures



**Fig. 1:** Vincent Smith, *Five Spot after Dark (for Miles)*, monochromatic print, 1989, G. W. Einstein Company, Inc., Private Collection.



**Fig. 2:** Vincent Smith, *Girl with Flower*, oil and sand and collage on canvas, 1972, G. W. Einstein Company, Inc., Private Collection.



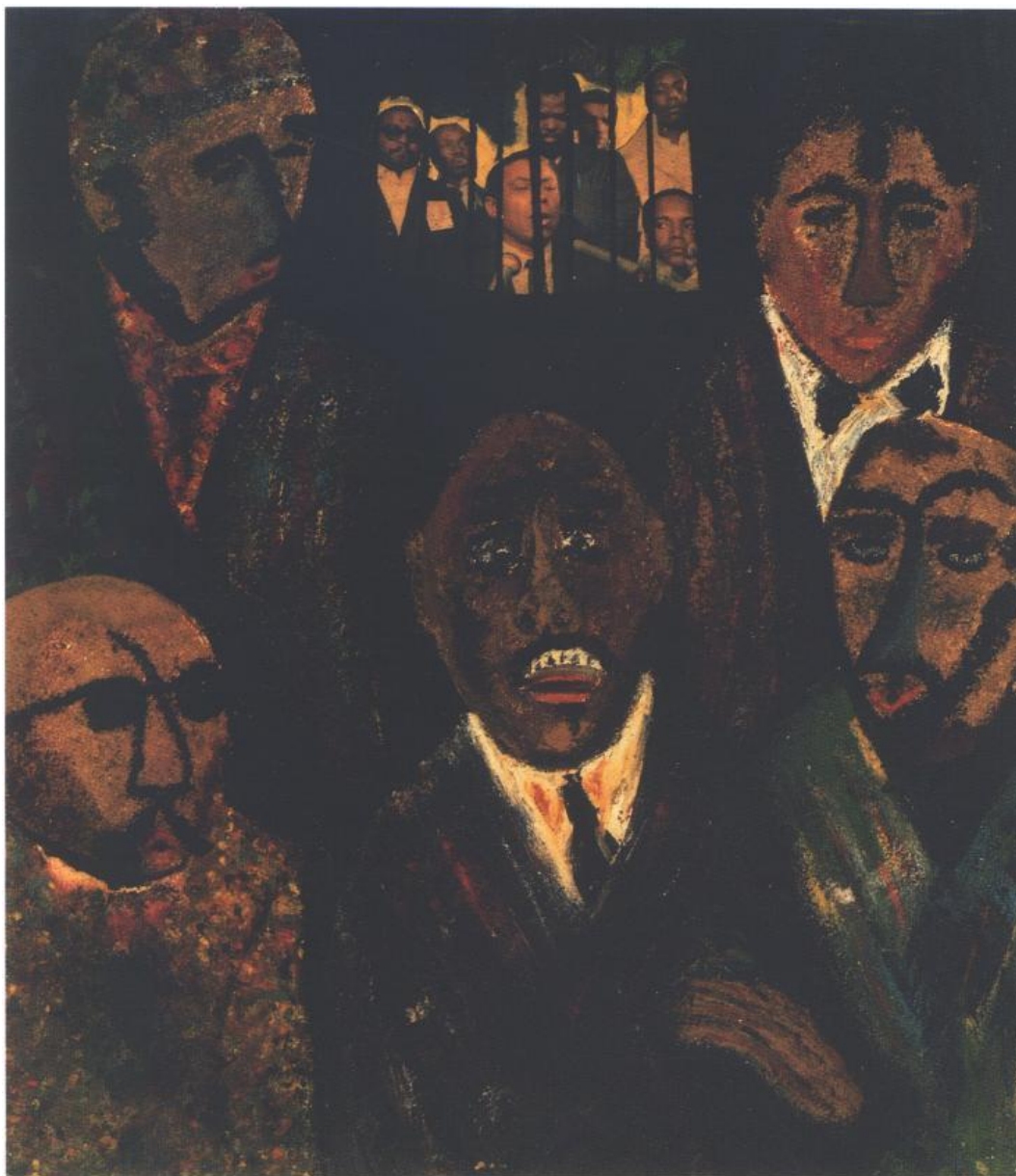


**Fig. 3:** Vincent Smith, *Before the Mayflower*, oil and collage on canvas, 1972, G. W. Einstein Company, Inc., Private Collection.





**Fig. 4:** Vincent Smith, *The Black Family*, oil and collage on canvas, 1972 or 1973, Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, OH.



**Fig. 5:** Vincent Smith, *Report from the Caucus Room*, oil, sand, and collage on canvas, 1967, Collection of the artist.





**Fig. 6:** Raphael, *Sistine Madonna*, oil on canvas, 1512-13, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden.



**Fig. 7:** Joos van Cleve, *Holy Family*, oil on wood, 1512-13, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



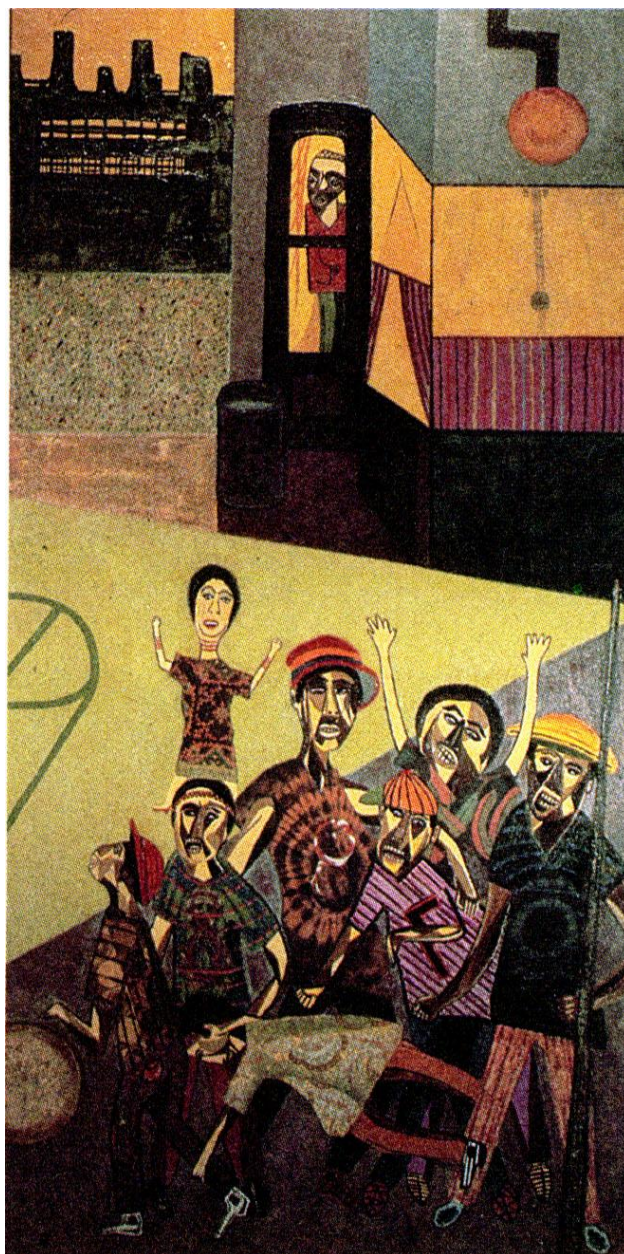


**Fig. 8:** Chasuble of Prince Michael Sutz, 1795, Church of the Greek Patriarchate, Istanbul reproduced in Marcu Beza, *Byzantine Art in Roumania* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1940), 42.



**Fig. 9:** Two-Sided with “Our Lady of the Benedictines” and Saint Peter, tempera, gold on wood, early 14<sup>th</sup> century, Benedictine Convent of Saint Mary, Zadar, Croatia.





**Fig. 10:** Vincent Smith, *This One's for Doc*, oil and collage on canvas, 1976, Collection of the artist.



**Fig. 11:** Face Mask *Chihongo*, wood, twentieth century, Chokwe, Angola/Democratic Republic of Congo, Private collection.





**Fig. 12:** Elizabeth Talford Scott, replica of Plantation Quilt, Fabric with mixed media (beads, sequins, stones, shells, buttons, plastic netting, and found objects), 1980, Collection of the artist.

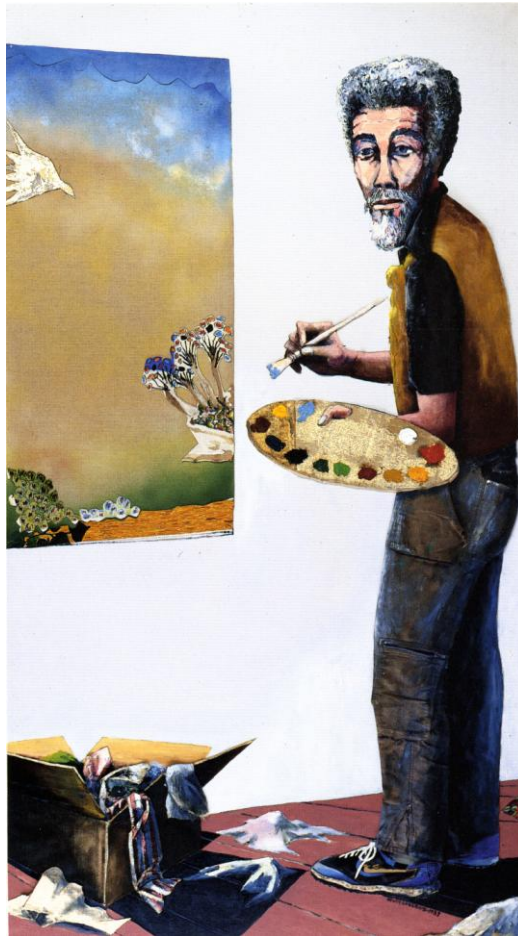


**Fig. 13:** Jacob Lawrence, *The Migration of the Negro, No. 12: The Railroad Stations were at times so over-packed with people leaving that special guards had to be called into keep order*, casein tempera on hardboard, 1940-41, The Museum of Modern Art, Washington, D.C. and New York.





**Fig. 14:** Jacob Lawrence, *Home Chores*, gouache on paper, 1945, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri.



**Fig. 15:** Benny Andrews, *Portrait of a Collagist*, oil and collage on canvas, 1989, Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Memphis, Tennessee.

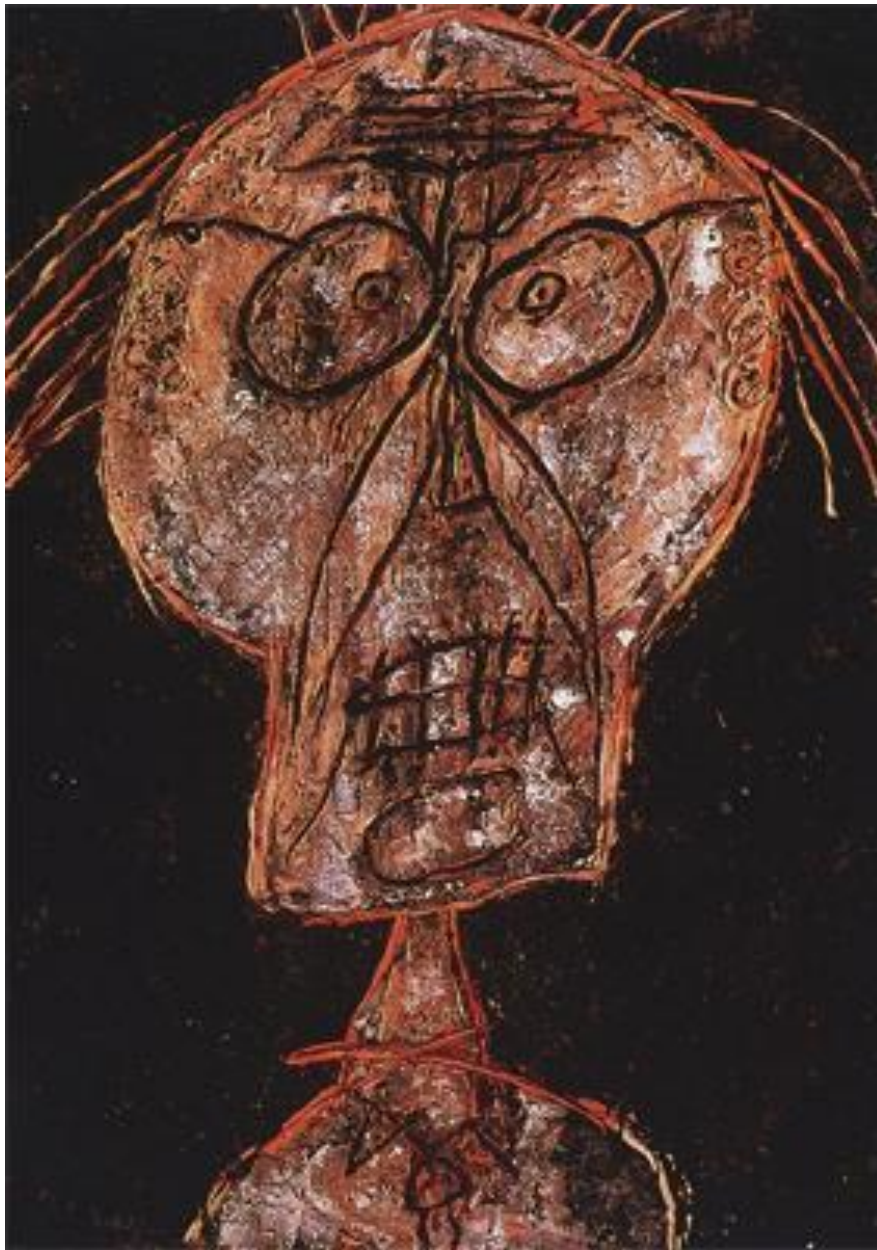


**Fig. 16:** Romare Bearden, *Prevalence of Ritual: Mysteries*, collage, polymer paint and pencil on board, 1964, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

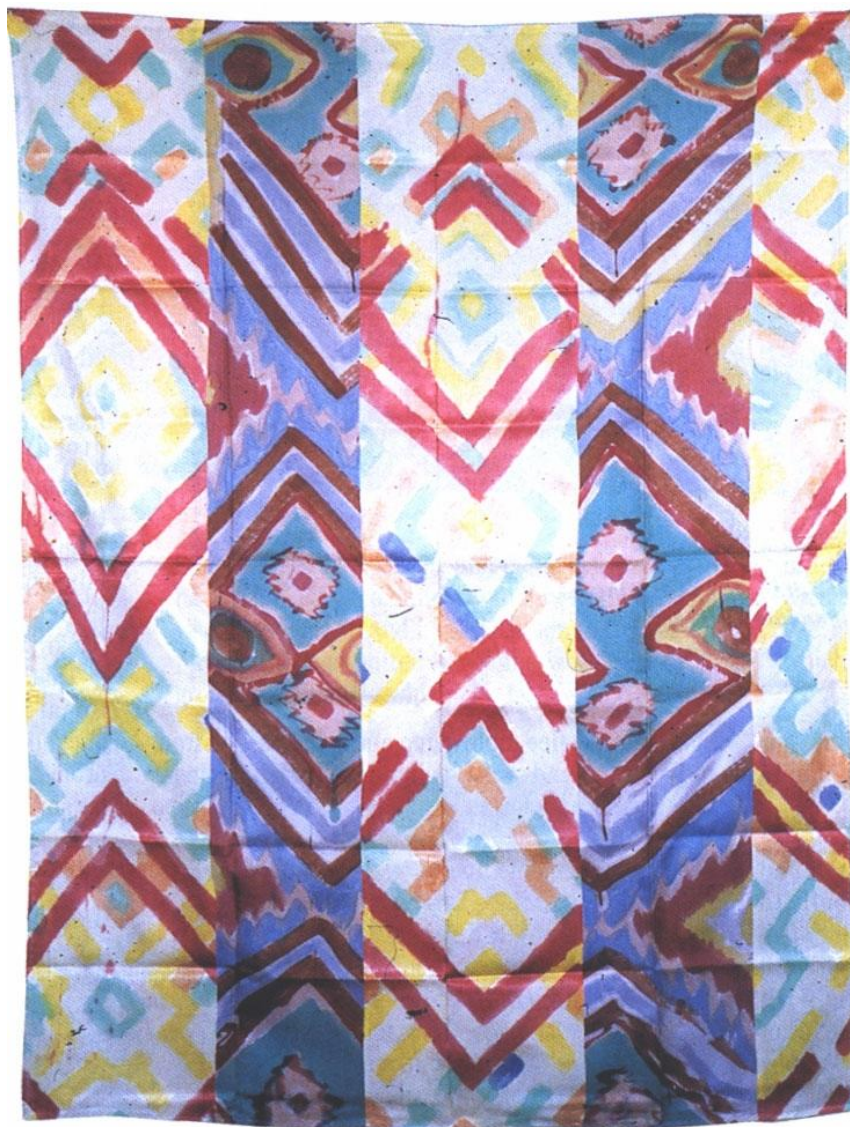




**Fig. 17:** Pablo Picasso, *Glass and Bottle of Suze*, pasted paper, gouache, and charcoal, 1912, Washington University Gallery of Art, St. Louis.



**Fig. 18:** Jean Dubuffet, *Dhotel in Apricot Color*, oil on canvas, 1947, source: ARTstor.

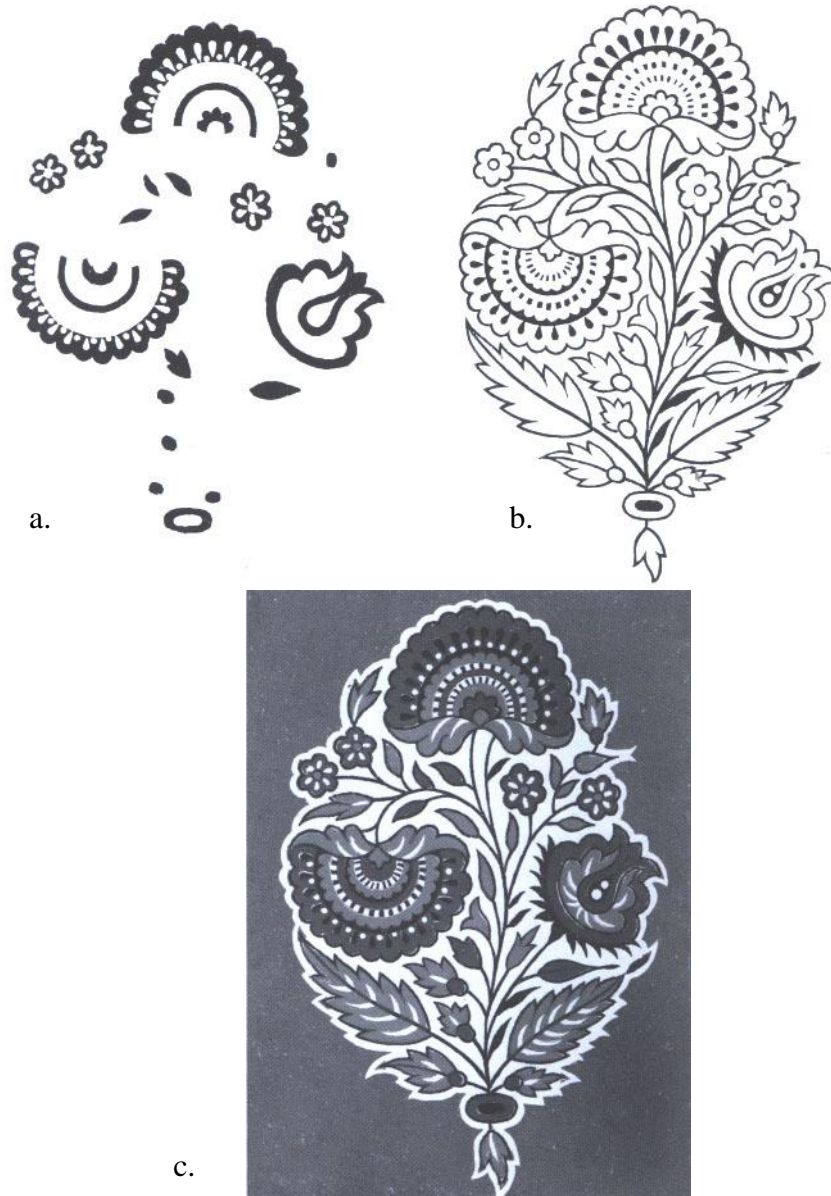


**Fig. 19:** Kim MacConnel, *Silver and Blue*, acrylic on mixed mediums, 1973, Collection of the artist.



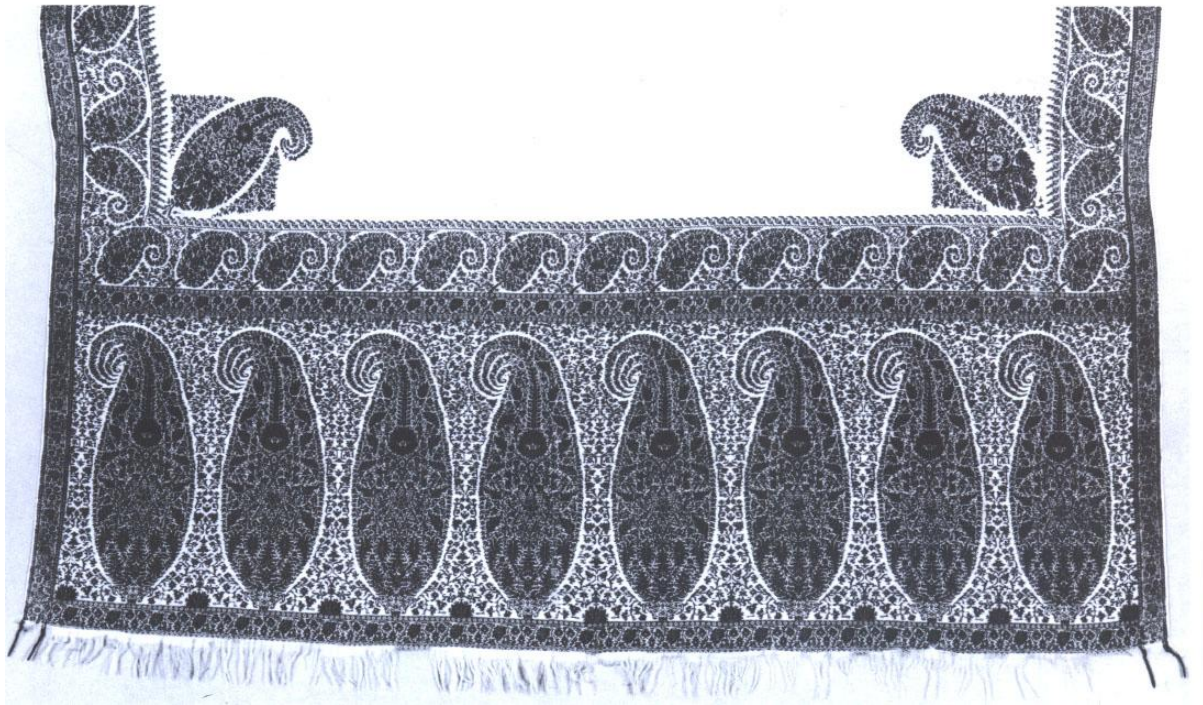


**Fig. 20:** Miriam Schapiro, *Curtains*, acrylic and fabric, 1972, Collection of the artist.

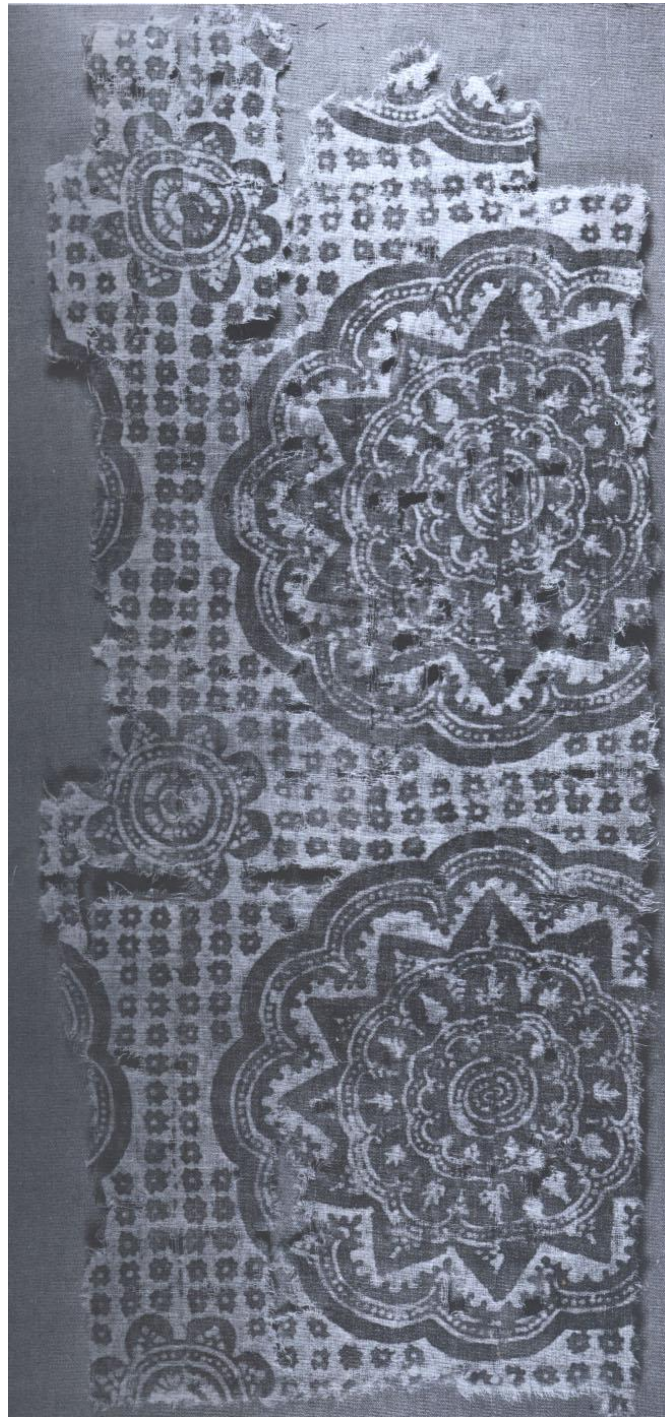


**Fig. 21:** Indian buta depicted in three stages: a. petals, b. outline, c. full, reproduced in Mattiebell Gittinger, *Master Dyers to the World: Technique and Trade in Early Indian Dyed Cotton Textiles* (Washington, D.C.: The Textile Museum, 1982), 194.



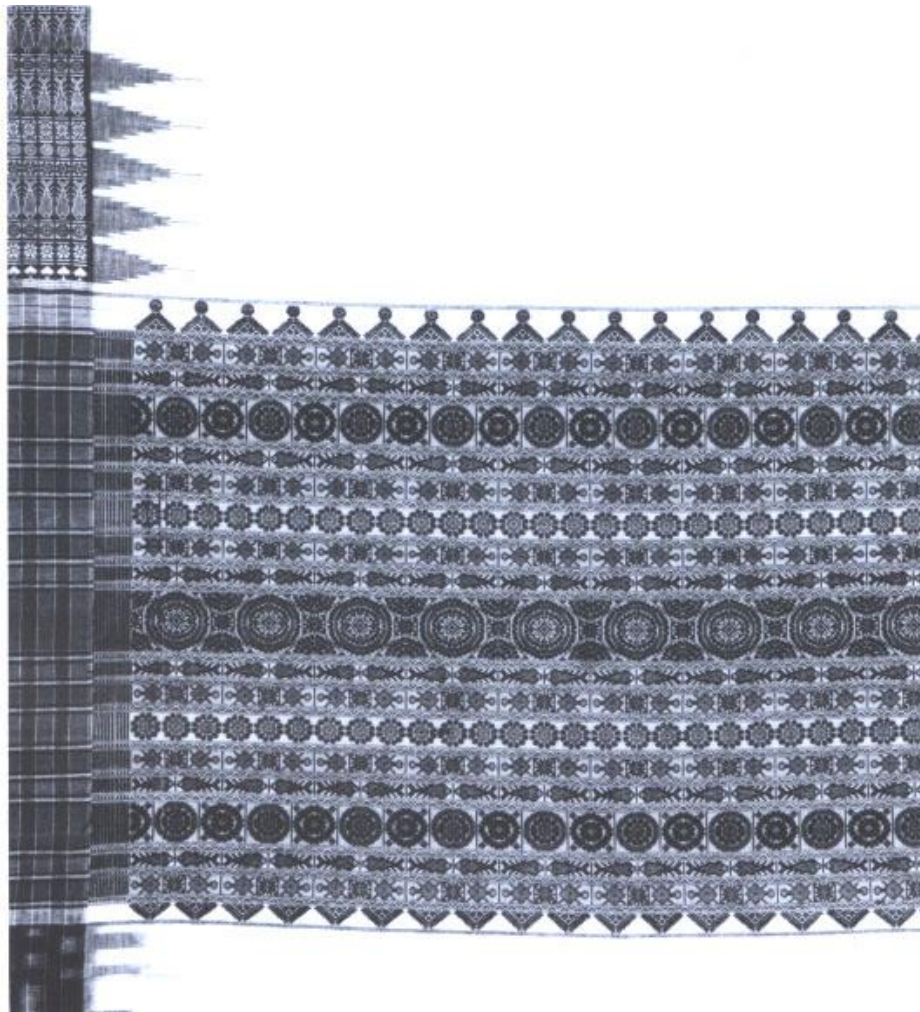


**Fig. 22:** Indian shawl, detail of border with paisley design, twill tapestry, goat fleece, undyed, blue, with red, green and yellow, c. 1830, Kashmir, reproduced in Blenda Femenias, and Joan A. Raducha, *Two Faces of South Asian Art: Textiles and Painting* (Madison: The Regents of the University of Wisconsin System, 1984), 16.



**Fig. 23:** Large, scalloped rosettes, cotton, stamped mordant, dyed red-brown, 13<sup>th</sup> century, India. reproduced in Mattie Belle Gittinger, *Master Dyers to the World: Technique and Trade in Early Indian Dyed Cotton Textiles* (Washington, D.C.: The Textile Museum, 1982), 41.





**Fig. 24:** Horizontal concentric roundels, Sari, detail of pallu, cotton, undyed, red, multicolor, before 1958, Barpali, Orissa, India, reproduced in Blenda Femenias, and Joan A. Raducha, *Two Faces of South Asian Art: Textiles and Painting* (Madison: The Regents of the University of Wisconsin System, 1984), 16.